



Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol 3, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 2003. Logos Electronic Edition, 2013.

According to the editor-

Volume Three, *The Divine Essence and Attributes*, examines post-Reformation theology on the unity of God's existence, God's divine essence and attributes, and divine will. Included is an analysis of the doctrine of God from the twelfth to the early eighteenth century.

In preceding sections of this multi-part review I've focused on various aspects of the collection's worth. Presently, then, I'll narrow my focus to Muller's treatment of the grandest of the Reformed theologians, Huldrych Zwingli specifically to ascertain whether or not Muller accurately represents his work.

He observes

At the very wellsprings of Reformed theology, however, in the thought of the scholastically and humanistically trained Ulrich Zwingli, we find a clear and strong precedent for a highly developed and quite traditional doctrine of God that evidences ties to the older Christian tradition and to classical philosophy. Stephens makes the point well that "the centre of Zwingli's theology is God—not God as opposed to Christ, but as opposed to all that is not God." In contrast to Luther, moreover, Zwingli offers a well-developed doctrine of God which, despite Zwingli's stated distaste for philosophical speculation and for the intrusion of philosophical categories into the doctrine of God, is quite traditional. Any attempt to argue discontinuity between the Reformation and the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God will need to sever Zwingli from the Reformation.

This is a solidly stated accurate representation of Zwingli's views. He is, moreover, right in noting Zwingli's importance as 'wellspring-ish'.

Muller says at several junctures that Zwingli's views influenced later thinkers by noting that 'From Zwingli onward...' For instance-

The concepts of divine perfection and divine necessity stand as corollaries, inasmuch as perfection stands over against the imperfection of contingent existence. They are also variously treated by the Reformed—sometimes as distinct attributes identified for individual treatment, sometimes as implications of the discussion of other attributes, sometimes in conjunction, sometimes separately. Divine perfection, moreover, was certainly an integral element of Reformed teaching from Zwingli onward. By way of basic definition,

God is absolutely and simply perfect, because he hath all things which are to be desired for the chiefest felicity. He is perfect first, in the highest degree of perfection, simply without any respect or comparison; secondly he is perfect in all kinds, 1 John 1:5. *John* saith he is light in which there is no darkness; that is, Perfect and Pure without the least mixture of the contrary, the Author and cause of all perfections in the creatures, [these perfections] are all in him, but more perfectly and in a more perfect manner. God is most absolutely Perfect, Job 22:2; Psalm 16:2; Matt. 5:48. The words in Scripture which signify this are, (1) *Schaddai*, which is as much as one sufficient to help himself, or one that gives nourishment to all other things, and therefore, Gen. 17:1, when God was to make a Covenant with Abraham, to leave all earthly things, and so trust in him only, he brings this argument, that he was such a sufficient God. (2) *Gomer*: the verb is used five times in the Psalms (7:10; cf. 7:6–8; 137:9; 53:3; 11:1). (3) *Tamim*, Job 37:16: it signifieth both Simple and Perfect.

He is also fundamentally correct to observe

In his fundamentally soteric approach to all doctrine, Luther could teach that a belief in God as the “almighty Maker of heaven and earth”—the credal formula—was necessary to the saving recognition that human beings neither have nor are able to attain anything in and of themselves. Thus, against the radicals, who refused to use such forms as the Apostles' Creed, Luther could not only insist on the teaching of the creed but on the understanding of the first article with its confession of “God, almighty Maker” as the foremost article of the faith. Luther's emphasis on the form of God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture did not militate so much against the traditional language of divine omnipotence as against the way in which that language had been understood and used: Luther was not, in other words, interested in rational speculation about the implications of the identification of God as omnipotent, but primarily in the soteriological meaning of the concept. The approach of Zwingli, certainly in his *De providentia*, can be seen as far less soteriological and far more philosophical than Luther's view—and, indeed, as a position marking the extreme limit of the Reformed view of omnipotence, from which Calvin and most of the Reformed orthodox drew back.

Muller, as so many, fails to appreciate the context, goal, and purpose of Zwingli's 'Sermon on Providence.' First, it wasn't the sermon delivered in Marburg. It was a greatly expanded intentionally philosophical tractate. And second, the 'Sermon' cannot be taken in isolation and made to represent the whole Zwingli any more than Luther's 'On The Jews and Their Lies' can be excised from Luther's corpus and made to seem all he did on the subject.

Furthermore Muller at least has the good sense to point readers, in his footnote, to the far more balanced and accurate exposition of William Peter Stephens-

Zwingli, *On Providence*, I-III (pp. 130-159); and note Calvin's reservations in *Institutes*, III.xxi.1 and, explicitly, in his correspondence with Bullinger, in CO 14, col. 235; trans. in Calvin, *Selected Works*, II, p. 333-334. Also note the discussion in Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, II, pp. 313-315; and note the more nuanced discussion Stephens, *Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, pp. 86-97, where the biblical foundations of Zwingli's teaching are balanced with the more philosophical language of the *De providential*.

And so, throughout, Zwingli is treated with the proper respect. And that, in my estimation, adds value to this already valued magnum opus.

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